

52. (Twice Amended) A skin for an automotive panel comprising:

a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive panel and surrounding an air bag skin portion of the panel, said main body skin portion further comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge; and

an air bag cover skin portion connected at said edge to said main body skin portion, said air bag cover skin portion comprising a second plastic material having a glass transition temperature lower than a glass transition temperature of the first plastic material.

88. (Twice Amended) A method of forming a skin for an automotive panel, the method comprising the steps of:

forming a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive panel and surrounding an air bag skin portion of the panel, said main body skin portion further comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge;

forming an air bag cover skin portion at said edge, said air bag cover skin portion comprising a second plastic material having a glass transition temperature lower than a glass transition temperature of said first plastic material; and

connecting said main body skin portion and said air bag cover skin portion together.

REMARKS

Claims 1-106 remain pending in this application. Claims 1, 36, 52 and 88 have been amended. Reexamination and reconsideration of the application is respectfully requested.

Claims 1 and 36 have been amended to recite that the first plastic material comprises an opening with an edge, and that the bond attaching the main body skin portion to the air bag cover

skin portion occurs at said edge. Support can be found at column 3, lines 40-47. In addition, the Examiner's attention is directed to Fig. 2 wherein item **20** is the main body skin portion, item **22** is the air bag cover skin portion. Item **38** is the inner edge of the main body skin portion **22**, and item **40** is the outer edge of the air bag cover skin **22**. See, col. 7, lines 43-50. The bond **25** is clearly seen attaching the main body skin portion at its edge to the air bag cover skin.

Claim 52 has been amended along similar lines. Specifically, claim 52 has been amended to recite a skin for an automotive panel comprising a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive panel surrounding the air bag cover skin portion of the panel, the main body skin portion further comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge, and an air bag cover skin portion connected at said edge to the main body portion, the air bag cover skin portion comprising a second plastic material having a glass transition temperature lower than a glass transition temperature of the first plastic material. With the Examiner's attention directed at Figure 1 of the present application, the Examiner will again note that said figure illustrates the main body skin portion **20** and an air bag cover skin portion **22** that are cast with closely adjacent inner and outer edges **38** and **40**, respectively, for the formation of the bond **25**. See Column 7, lines 44-47.

Similar comments apply to method claim 88 as amended herein. Again, said claim has been amended to recite forming a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive panel surrounding the air bag cover skin portion of the panel, comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge, and forming an air bag cover skin portion at said edge. Accordingly, Applicants direct the Examiner's attention to Figure 1 and Column 7, lines 44-50 as support for said amendment.

It is submitted that the amendments to claims 1, 36, 52 and 88 are all fully supported by the specification, no new matter has been entered, and said amendments should be properly entered.

Turning to the rejections based upon the art, Applicants note that the claims have been rejected under 35 USC 102(e) as being anticipated by Yamasaki et al. (US Patent No. 5,839,752). In addition, the '752 patent has been relied upon by the Examiner as the principle reference for the rejections of the claims under 35 USC 103(a). The Examiner also cited US Patent No. 6,237,935 to Gray et al. as a secondary reference in support of the rejections under 35 USC 103. Applicants herein respond as follows.

Turning to Yamasaki '752, it is noted that said reference relates to a thermoformed air bag cover having multiple layers, but the same underlying skin composition across the entire surface of the panel. This is immediately apparent upon review of Figure 1 of the '752 patent which illustrates skin layer 13, foam layer 15 and barrier layer 14. There simply then is no question that Yamasaki '752 discloses and teaches that the skin layer 13 and barrier layer 14 are the same at every point in the instrument panel and at the air bag opening.

With this in mind, the Examiner's attention is directed to pending claim 1. The Examiner will note that said claim recites a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive interior panel surrounding the air bag deployment portion of the panel, the main body skin portion comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge, and an air bag cover skin portion connected at said edge and adapted to cover the air bag deployment portion of the automotive interior panel. The claim goes on to recite a bond attaching the main body skin portion at said edge to the air bag cover skin portion.

Hopefully, it is now immediately clear to the Examiner that the principal reference relied upon, Yamasaki '752, fails to teach or suggest anything resembling an automotive interior panel of a main body skin portion surrounding the air bag deployment portion of the panel and the bond attaching the main body skin portion to the air bag cover skin portion. Stated another way, nowhere in Yamasaki '752 is there any teaching or suggestion of a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive interior panel surrounding the air bag deployment portion of the panel, since Yamasaki '752 discloses and teaches that the upper skin layer 13 and lower barrier layer 14 are the same at every point on the instrument panel and at the air bag opening.

Furthermore, and understandably, Yamasaki fails to teach or suggest anything remotely resembling a main body skin portion with an opening comprising an edge and an air bag cover skin portion connected at said edge. This is completely removed from Yamasaki's teachings, which, as the Examiner is aware, teaches that "the layers are the same at every point meaning the length and width." See, Office Action of April 23, 2002, at page 6.

Turning next to independent claim 36, Applicants wish to point out that said claim requires a method forming a skin for an automotive interior panel wherein the skin comprises a main body skin portion for covering most of the outer surface of the panel having an opening comprising an edge, and an air bag cover portion bordered at the edge by the main body skin portion for covering only an air bag deployment portion of the air bag cover panel. The claim goes on to recite forming the air bag skin portion by casting a second plastic material against the second surface area of the heated shell tool bounded by the first surface area. Finally, claim 36 has been amended to recite forming a bond at said edge of the main body skin portion.

Once again, Applicants wish to point out that nowhere in Yamasaki '752 is there any teaching or suggestion for the formation of a skin comprising a main body skin portion for covering most of an outer surface of the panel having an opening comprising an edge, and an air bag cover skin portion bordered by the main body skin portion at said edge for covering only an air bag deployment portion. Once again, Yamasaki '752 disclose and teach that upper skin layer 13 and lower barrier layer 14 are the same at every point on the instrument panel and at the air bag opening.

The Examiner's attention is next directed to claim 52. As noted, claim 52 now recites a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive panel surrounding the air bag cover skin portion of the panel, comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge, and an air bag cover skin portion connected at said edge to the main body skin portion. In a related manner, independent claim 88 recites a method for forming a skin for an automotive panel, the method comprising the steps of forming a main body portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive panel surrounding the air bag cover skin portion of the panel, comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge, and forming an air bag cover skin portion at said edge.

Accordingly, it should again be clear to the Examiner that there is simply no question that Yamasaki '752 fails to disclose or teach such features of Applicants' invention. Again, Yamasaki '752 discloses and teaches that the upper skin layer 13 and lower barrier layer 14 are the same at every point on the instrument panel and at the air bag opening.

Applicants would like to further expand upon the arguments noted above. In the present invention, the first plastic material makes up the main body skin portion and the second plastic material makes up the air bag cover skin portion and the air bag cover skin portion is connected

at an edge of the main body skin portion. Therefore, the air bag cover skin portion material above the air bag dispensing apparatus is different (either in ductility as recited in claims 1 and 36 or Tg as recited in claims 52 and 88). Such feature is entirely missing in Yamasaki '752, as Yamasaki '752 discloses and teaches that the upper skin layer 13 and the lower barrier layer 14 are the same at every point on the instrument panel and at the air bag opening. Accordingly, critically examined, Yamasaki et al. actually teaches away from the subject manner of the present invention.

Applicants also respectfully are unable to agree with the Examiner's comments in the Final Office Action dated April 23, 2002 at paragraph 7, in the section identified as "Response to Arguments". Here, the Examiner stated that "the Yamasaki, et al reference teaches the claimed invention. The Examiner then stated that the claimed invention was simply a claim for a "main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive trim panel" and "an air bag cover skin portion adapted to cover the air bag deployment portion". The Examiner opined that such did not preclude the multiple layers of Yamasaki et al. covering every point of the instrument panel."

It is respectfully submitted that the Examiner did not consider the entirety of claim 1. Specifically, amended claim 1 now recites "a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive interior panel **surrounding the air bag deployment portion, the main body skin portion being of a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge;** an air bag cover skin portion **connected at said edge and** adapted to cover the air bag deployment portion of the automotive trim panel, the air bag cover skin portion **comprising a second plastic material having the property of remaining substantially more ductile than the first plastic material;** and a bond attaching the main body skin portion **at said edge** to the

air bag cover skin portion; and an air bag deployment region disposed within the air bag cover skin portion and adapted to open with the air bag deployment door in response to the force of an inflating air bag.

Yamasaki et al. simply does not teach the use of a different plastic materials in the air bag deployment portion of the skin than in the main body portion. Yamasaki et al. teaches vacuum forming (Column 4, lines 61-65 of '752) of a trilaminate of a skin layer 13 of soft polyvinyl chloride, a foaming layer 15 of foamed polypropylene and a barrier layer 14 of olefin thermoplastic elastomer (Column 4, lines 15-20)(see also Column 7, lines 12-17 of '752 and Column 3, lines 60-67 of '752). Yamasaki would not be able to readily create by vacuum forming a construction as claimed by the Applicants wherein a main body skin portion of a first material surrounds and is bonded to an air bag cover skin portion of a second material. That is why the Applicants prefer to use casting or spraying the materials on a heated tool.

Finally, regarding the secondary reference to Gray, et al (US Patent No. 6,237,935 B1), this reference is directed at "an outer skin layer overlying and spaced from said retainer and door members". In other words, an outer skin layer of a single material. Column 1, lines 66-96 confirms this teaching of Gray et al where it recites "[a] continuous outer flexible polymeric skin layer is spaced in overlying relation to the retainer and door members, between which an intermediate layer of foam is sandwiched in place."

Included herein is a Marked Copy of the Amended Claim Showing Changes.

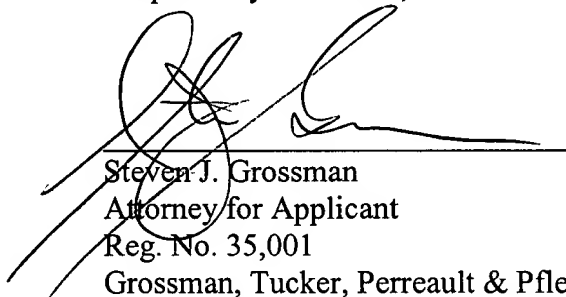
In consideration of the amendments to the claims and the remarks hereinabove, Applicants respectfully submit that all of the objections and rejections raised by the Office Action, mailed May 21, 2002, have been overcome by this response. Accordingly, all claims

currently pending in the application are believed to be in condition for allowance. Allowance at an early date is respectfully solicited.

In the event the Examiner deems personal contact is necessary, please contact the undersigned attorney at (603) 668-6560.

In the event there are any fee deficiencies or additional fees are payable, please charge them (or credit any overpayment) to our Deposit Account No. 50-121.

Respectfully submitted,



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CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service First Class Mail in an envelope addressed to: BOX RCE, Assistant Commissioner of Patents, Washington, DC 20231 on October 23, 2002, at Manchester, New Hampshire.

By: Carol McClelland
Carol McClelland

MARKED UP COPY OF AMENDED CLAIMS SHOWING CHANGES

1. (Once Amended) A skin for an automotive interior panel, the interior panel including an air bag deployment portion; the skin comprising:

a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive interior panel surrounding the air bag deployment portion of the panel, the main body skin portion comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge;

an air bag cover skin portion connected at said edge and adapted to cover the air bag deployment portion of the automotive interior panel, the air bag cover skin portion comprising a second plastic material having the property of remaining substantially more ductile with decreasing temperature than the first plastic material;

a bond attaching the main body skin portion at said edge to the air bag cover skin portion;
and

an air bag deployment region disposed within the air bag cover skin portion and adapted to open with the air bag deployment door in response to the force of an inflating air bag.

36. (Once Amended) A method of forming a skin for an automotive interior panel wherein the skin comprises a main body skin portion for covering most of an outer surface of the panel having an opening comprising an edge, and an air bag cover skin portion bordered at the edge by the main body skin portion for covering only an air bag deployment portion of the air bag cover panel, the method comprising the steps of:

forming the main body skin portion by casting a first plastic material against a first surface area of a heated shell tool to form a first plastic skin casting to the desired shape of the main body skin portion, and

forming the air bag cover skin portion by casting a second plastic material against a second surface area of the heated shell tool bounded by the first surface area to form a second plastic skin casting to the desired shape of the air bag cover skin portion, and

forming a bond at said edge of the main body skin portion and attaching the main body skin portion and the air bag cover skin portion together while on the heated shell tool.

52. (Twice Amended) A skin for an automotive panel comprising:

a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive panel and surrounding an air bag skin portion of the panel, said main body skin portion further comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge; and

an air bag cover skin portion connected at said edge to said [the] main body skin portion, said [the] air bag cover skin portion comprising a second plastic material having a glass transition temperature lower than a glass transition temperature of the first plastic material.

88. (Twice Amended) A method of forming a skin for an automotive panel, the method comprising the steps of:

forming a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive panel and surrounding an air bag skin portion of the panel, said main body skin portion further comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge;

forming an air bag cover skin portion at said [the] edge, said air bag cover skin portion comprising a second plastic material having a glass transition temperature lower than a glass transition temperature of said [the] first plastic material; and

connecting said [the] main body skin portion and said [the] air bag cover skin portion together.